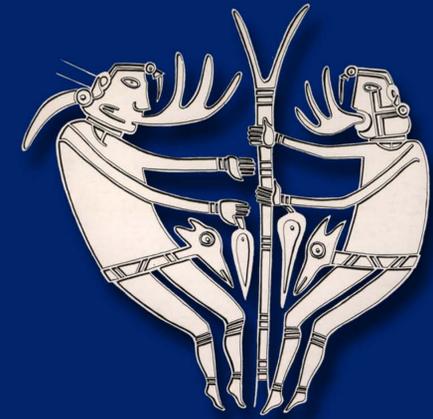


Agriculture

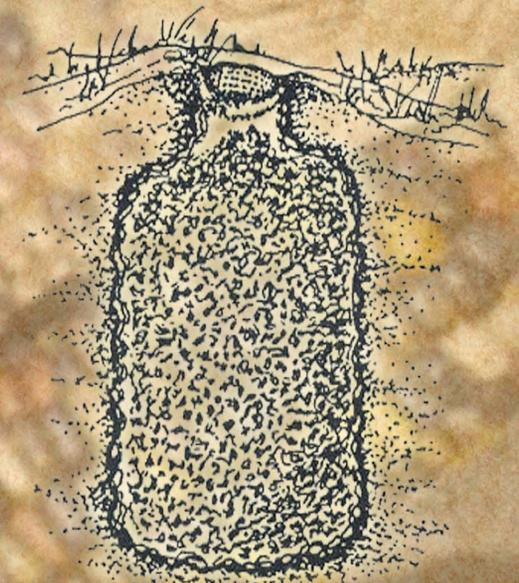
yakni áhokchit isht aya



Although their ancestors relied upon an economy based primarily on hunting, fishing, and gathering wild foods, “The Choctaws have long been known to excel all the North American Indians in agriculture, subsisting to a considerable extent on the product of their field” (Cushman 1899:250).

Woodland Period Horticulture (1000 B.C. – 1000 A.D.)

The people of the Woodland Period continued to improve on year-round village living with the use of pottery and gardening. In addition to semi-permanent base camps or villages they practiced seasonal migrations to smaller satellite camps used on a temporary basis by small groups to obtain specific foods and supplies (Bense 1994:130). Pottery may have been useful in gardening, as it enabled the storage of seeds and easier transport of water. The Choctaw ancestors also used storage pits dug into the ground to store dried foods (Bense 1994:120). Although the bulk of the diet was still provided through hunting, fishing, and gathering, the crops were an important addition, especially those that could be dried and stored for use during the winter months. The crops which were cultivated included bottle gourd, squash, maygrass, knotweed, goosefoot, sumpweed, and sunflower to name a few (Bense 1994:119). Many of the plants that we now consider weeds, such as goosefoot, were grown as grain crops during this period. Evidence suggests that many of these early cultigens were domesticated much earlier in other areas, such as the container crops, bottle gourd and squash, which were cultivated ca. 5200 B.C. and ca. 3000 – 2000 B.C. respectively (Bense 1994:119; Galloway 1995:33). It is important to remember that, “studies have shown that maize [corn] was not important to the diet of societies in the Southeast during the Woodland Stage” (Bense 1994:119).



Underground storage pit
(adapted from Bense 1994).



nahokchih "Mode of Tilling and Planting,"
engraving number 21
by Theodore de Bry, 1591.

Mississippian Period Agriculture (A.D. 1000 – 1500)

The best practices for success, adopted during previous periods, were incorporated to allow for the development of larger and larger permanent villages. The adoption of corn or maize as a crop started to appear at this time along with beans, as early as A.D. 800 (Galloway 1995:33). Although corn was first domesticated in Mexico by ca. 7000 B.C. it did not become an important element in the local diet until the Mississippian Period (Bense 1994:165). The cultivation of corn, beans, and squash, often referred to as the “Three Sisters” along with some of the older domesticates provided an important supplement to the original diet of wild foods from hunting, fishing, and gathering but did not replace it (Bense 1994:186). The widespread adoption of corn and this type of swidden or slash-and-burn agriculture would spark significant lifestyle and cultural changes.



Isht toksali

Reproductions of pre-historic
hafted tools (adapted from
Fundaburk & Foreman 1957).